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THE FIGHT TO MAKE NEW YORK CITY 'DRY'

New Chief Is Undismayed by All-Pervading Wetness

Hailing From Kentucky, Fifth Man to Undertake Difficult Task Knows All About Moonshining and Finds Plenty of It Here as Well as Legion of Smugglers--Flood of Liquor Diverted From Legitimate Channels and General Disregard for Eighteenth Amendment--Predicts Situation Will Soon Get Down to Home Brew and Hip Pocket Proposition

THE following article gives the readers of THE NEW YORK HERALD not only a vivid account of the liquor situation in New York city and State as seen by Ernest S. Langley, the new Chief Prohibition Supervising Agent for this district, but presents also a striking description of the man himself, a strong character in which decision and a fighting spirit go with many picturesque traits. That a man who was born in the moonshine region of Kentucky should be one to undertake the sponging up of New York may appear something in the nature of a paradox, but as a matter of fact Mr. Langley has spent years in such work.

That the new enforcement chief, the fifth in succession in the office, is fully aware of the difficulties that beset the path of dry agents in his district is apparent from his observations of conditions as they exist here and elsewhere in the country. These difficulties he enumerates in a forceful and sparkling manner, and says they only spur him to keener effort. He also makes some interesting predictions concerning changes pertaining to the liquor situation in New York.

By EDWIN C. HILL.

TRRRRRRLLLLLNNNGGGG!!
The telephone in the inner office of Room 801, 49 West Twenty-seventh street, breaks the quiet querulously, insistently. The man at the big flat topped desk shifts a cigar from the southwest to the northeast corner of his mouth, reaches for the instrument, claps his ear to the receiver and shoots out: "Well!"

Then one hears, after the man at the other end of the wire has said his piece.

"Hell, no! Pay no attention to lawyers. Don't listen to lies. Read what's written on your warrant and serve it out to the letter. I'll stand by you—if you are on the level."

Clip-clap, the receiver goes into its hook and the one syllable person with a burr on his tongue swings around to his visitor.

"Oh, you little old wet New York!" he soliloquizes. "Where in the name of the Lord does the stuff all come from? Give me about 500 honest, well paid booze sleuths and I will guarantee to make the city as dry as the Mohave Desert—well, pretty nearly, anyway—but I'm blessed if I see how we can mop up this all pervading wetness with the little sponge that Uncle Sam gives us. It's one hell of a job, I'll tell the world, including Russia."

Introducing Ernest S. Langley, Chief Dry Agent in New York State

Suspecting that it's about time to introduce this gentleman of speech so direct, I hereby present Mr. Ernest S. Langley of eastern Kentucky, Chief Prohibition Supervising Agent for the State of New York, which means to many folk the Chief Gloom of the U. S. A. Take a good look at the Langley man. Possibly just possibly, you might want to see him first on some occasion. At all events he's worth a glance or two.

Some men and most women suggest color tones. Langley is brown. His face is tanned almost to a light coffee color by years of Government sleuthing out of doors in all sorts of climates and weathers. He has the complexion of a sailor, of an adventurer. He looks like a two gun man. He would do for one of Bill Hart's stickup dramas of the cinema, assistant hero or villain, either one. He is not a big man by any means, sizing up for what is often called "medium build." That is to say, he is about 5 feet 9 inches tall, well muscled though not conspicuously so, weighs probably 160 pounds, and suggests competency to handle himself creditably in a scrap. His light brown hair is thinning a bit at the age of 45, though he has enough left to cover the top of his pate. His dark brown eyes are sufficiently wide apart to invite confidence. His forehead is high. His nose turns up a little at the tip and his rather wide mouth has rather thin lips. His jaw is prominently modelled and he has a good, firm chin. Altogether the chief enforcement officer resembles a man of decision just as he looks like a fighter.

Langley's Retreat Always

Is Safe From Invasion

The office is astonishingly bare. Except for the flat topped desk at which Langley and his chief assistant Ray Conley, sit, there is little more than a spare chair in the whole big room. The desk is exactly in the centre of the emerald green carpet. There are two entrances to Langley's retreat and the spring lock is kept on both doors. Langley is as accessible as a bank president, no more so.

There are seven good reasons why he de-

on the Big Sandy River with the sickish-sweet smell of moonshine in his nose, and all his life he has been trailing the stuff. "I certainly know whiskey from the ground up," he says.

turned out, having been temporary appointee, fillers in. Langley wants to stick even though he realizes that he has about the meanest job of anybody in the United States.

Langley in his inner office at 49 West Twenty-seventh street, is about as accessible as a bank president, except possibly by telephone. He gets many a tip over the wire.



ERNEST S. LANGLEY,
Chief Prohibition Supervising Agent for New York State.

homes. These contrivances are being manufactured enormously and there is no doubt that they have a wide sale. One can buy a very classy still for about \$40, copper and everything. It might amaze the community if we could get a look at all the good people who are moonshining thus in utter contempt of the law of their country. And it isn't a thing we can get at. In order to enter a private residence we must first supply evidence that the law is being violated. We must prove that a still is in operation or that beer is being brewed. And yet it is virtually impossible to get evidence without getting into the house. We get nowhere in that business.

Thinks There Always Will Be Some Booze Sloshing Around

"Eventually, in my judgment, say in about three years, the liquor problem in New York city will get down to a home brew and hip pocket proposition. I don't believe New York can ever be made dry in a literal sense. There will always be some booze sloshing around. Much of it will come from the private stills. It is easy to make and of good quality if let alone to age. I don't see what we are going to do about the hip pockets. You can't go around rapping every doubtful looking citizen upon his southern exposure."

"How much distilled liquor is there in the country and in this New York district, Chief Langley?"

"That's hard to say with any accuracy," Langley replied. "So much is concealed and held out in hidly holes. There are probably 40,000,000 gallons of whiskey in the country, and I am dead sure there is enough of the stuff hidden in barns and cellars around New York to run the city for at least two years. All this stuff is aside from the liquor now in bonded warehouses under Uncle Sam's lock and key. It represents millions of gallons that were withdrawn on forged permits. There was a period a few months ago when forged permits turned up like autumn leaves. Unquestionably hundreds of individuals and dealers seized a chance to get goods out of bond and into a safe hiding place. That stuff keeps trickling steadily into the market and there's so much of it that the occasional seizures we are able to make have no perceptible effect. It would take thousands of revenue agents instead of the few dozen we have to round up this liquor."

Smuggling Most Troublesome Factor in Liquor Situation

"How about the smuggling situation?" "Bad," said Langley. "That's the biggest trouble of all. Enough whiskey comes through from Canada to float the United States Navy. In a stretch of twenty-two counties in this State we have only eighteen men to keep an eye upon 114 gateways through which booze can ooze from Canada. That's absurd, of course. The result is that little progress is made stopping the smugglers. They do about as they please and their tricks and devices are endless. They use fast motor cars with blinding headlights. They pack the stuff through the woods over Indian trails and deer runs, carrying five and ten gallon tins. They bring it over in canoes. Their stratagems are endless. There is a daily traffic in this smuggled whiskey from Canada. Smuggling runs the entire length of the border, but we get our share at this end."

"I have mentioned three sources of supply, the moonshine, home made liquor; the liquor that was withdrawn from bond by the millions of gallons on forged permits some months ago, and the liquor that is smuggled in from Canada and to a small extent from steamships returning from Panama, Mexico, Cuba, the Bahamas and

the Bermudas, as well as from European ports. This is relatively light, but a good deal does get in first and last, and it all contributes to our troubles.

"The fourth means of supply for the thirsty is the bonded whiskey released on bona fide permits from Government warehouses and then diverted from the legal and permitted use in medicines and toilet articles to straight beverage purposes. A whole lot of whiskey goes astray in that way."

"Here's the way the scheme is worked ordinarily. A wholesale dealer goes to the State Prohibition Director, Charles R. O'Connor, and obtains a permit to withdraw ten barrels of whiskey, declaring the whiskey is for non-beverage purposes, drugs and medicines. Then the wholesaler promptly sells to another wholesaler, who sells to a third, who does business with a fourth, who may split the lot in selling to his customers, and finally the ten barrels are so divided and subdivided that it is sometimes impossible to identify the withdrawal. Somewhere along this devious course of trade the liquor gets into the hands of bootleggers. There have been about 30,000,000 gallons of whiskey withdrawn, and the speculation is that the greater part of it has been diverted to beverage purposes."

Cooperates With State Agents Against Crooked Wholesalers

"Much of our enforcement work is obtaining evidence to show Volstead act violation and conspiracy by crooked wholesalers. There is where we work in cooperation with State Director O'Connor's department. The State Director issues all permits for withdrawals and there are six or seven different kinds of permits. These are importation and exportation, transportation, manufacturing, physicians and a permit for sacramental purposes. It is our business to check up all along the line to see if the permits are honestly used. We follow after O'Connor's office. If we suspect that a wholesaler is diverting whiskey to bootleggers we examine that man's books as the law gives us a right to do. We find when and to whom he sold the liquor withdrawn. Then we hop to the second set of books. Sometimes we have to go to five or six dealers before we get the trace of where the withdrawal was broken up and illegally diverted. If we can locate the actual diverter we put him out of business but it is not easy to do."

"Druggists are making under permit an enormous amount of toilet articles and proprietary medicines, so they say, or so their books show, and locating a needle in a haystack is a cinch compared to tracing a barrel of alcohol in a drug store. We investigate all classes of permits as closely as possible, even the sacramental variety. The Jews are the greatest withdrawers of wine under this class of permit, every rabbi being allowed ten gallons a year for every family in his flock."

"What's your opinion of enforcement as it touches the saloons?" "Not so good as it should be," Langley replied squarely. "There are lots of saloonkeepers in New York that are selling booze more or less openly. Some of them have been arrested—many, in fact. Some of them have been acquitted or have been the beneficiaries of a disagreement. Public opinion operating again, you see. Almost all are slippery customers and have invented a variety of brand new tricks to protect them from raiders. In the first place, it is virtually impossible for a stranger to get a drink. I'll bank on that. I mean that you couldn't walk unaccompanied into a saloon you had never been in before and where,

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Langley's Highlights on the Liquor Situation

"I'm blessed if I see how we can mop up this all pervading wetness with the little sponge that Uncle Sam gives us. It's one hell of a job, I'll tell the world, including Russia. . . . I know what I'm up against, but that sort of spurs a man to do his keenest."

"One can buy a very classy still for about \$40, copper and everything. It might amaze the community if we could get a look at all the good people who are moonshining thus in utter contempt of the law of their country."

"Eventually, in my judgment, say in about three years, the liquor problem in New York city will get down to a home brew and hip pocket proposition. I don't believe New York can ever be made dry in the literal sense. There will always be some booze sloshing around."

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"Saloon keepers sell nowadays only to people they know and can rely on not to give evidence against them. There seems to be a very numerous class of such persons."

"It is my opinion that the new State enforcement law, making the police force enforcement agents, means the finish of the corner gin mill. I don't see how the saloons can buck the game."

"I have watched my men pretty closely. I believe they are square men. If I find one of them betraying me he will know something has hit him."

"Enforcement agents get about \$1,700 a year. They should have \$3,000. I believe there would be less disposition for men to go wrong and that a better class of men would be drawn into the service."

"An immense amount of information comes to us from informers. The prohibition law has furnished a way for lots of people to pay off old scores, it would seem, and Uncle Sam is the gainer thereby."

"There were 39,000,000 gallons of grain alcohol released in 1920 for patent medicines, hair tonics and such—three times as much as ever before."

"Liquor is so expensive and so bad in most places where it is accessible at all that few buy except men confirmed in their addiction and with the price."

"It's going to take a long time, maybe a whole generation, for public opinion in New York to change as regards the prohibition law. But we of the enforcement agencies will just have to rack along doing the best we can."